



Washington Department of
FISH and WILDLIFE

Wolf Post-recovery Planning in Washington

Online at wdfw.wa.gov/wolves-post-recovery

August 2019

Purpose

The purpose of this effort is to develop an updated conservation and management plan for wolves in Washington to ensure a healthy, productive wolf population with long-term stability once wolves are recovered and no longer designated as state or federally endangered. The plan will guide WDFW in long-term wolf conservation and management.

Background

Historically, gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) were common throughout most of Washington, but they declined rapidly between 1850 and 1900. The primary cause of this decline was the killing of wolves by Euro-American settlers as ranching and farming activities expanded. They were essentially eliminated as a breeding species from the state by the 1930s. Wolves were classified as endangered in Washington at the federal level in 1973 and at the state level in 1980.

Confirmed reports of dispersing wolves in northern Washington from growing populations in Idaho, Montana, and British Columbia, Canada began to increase after 1990, but the first resident pack in the state since the 1930s was not documented until 2008 in Okanogan County in north-central Washington. Since that time, wolves have continued to naturally recolonize the state by dispersing from resident Washington packs and neighboring states and provinces.

In response to the return of wolves to Washington, there was a need for a state recovery plan per WAC 220-610-110, and in anticipation of the eventual return of all wolf management to the state, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) initiated development of a state wolf conservation and management plan under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) in 2007. Assisted by an 18-member working group comprised of stakeholders, the plan was developed during 2007–2011 and was adopted in December 2011 by the state Fish and Wildlife Commission. The 2011 Wolf Conservation and Management Plan provided the outline for state wolf management and was designed to restore and protect a self-sustaining wolf population in Washington. It is the guiding document for wolf management in the state to date.

Since 2008, Washington's wolf population has grown by an average of 28 percent per year. As of December 31, 2018, wolf numbers in Washington have increased to a minimum of 126 individuals, 27 packs, and 15 successful breeding pairs, marking a population increase for the 10th consecutive year and the highest counts to date. Not only is Washington's wolf population growing, but its distribution is also expanding westward in the state. In 2018, WDFW biologists confirmed the state's first wolf pack west of the Cascade crest in the modern era, while the number of packs in the North Cascades recovery region increased from three to five and the number of successful breeding pairs from one to three. WDFW is confident that Washington's wolf population is on a path leading to successful recovery.

In addition, on March 15, 2019, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a proposal to federally delist gray wolves in the lower 48 states. Under the proposal, wolves in Washington statewide would be federally delisted and management authority would be returned to the state, except for tribal reservations and national parks.

In anticipation of and given the pace of wolf recovery, and in light of potential listing status changes, WDFW proposes to develop a post-recovery conservation and management plan for wolves to guide long-term wolf conservation and management under state authority once wolves are considered recovered in Washington and are no longer designated as state or federally endangered.

FAQs

What is a post-recovery plan?

A post-recovery conservation and management plan for wolves will guide long-term wolf conservation and management under state authority once the wolf population in Washington is considered recovered and is no longer designated as state or federally endangered.

Doesn't the department already have a wolf plan?

Yes, the department currently uses the 2011 Wolf Conservation and Management Plan to guide wolf conservation and management in Washington. However, this plan is now eight years old and was developed specifically to inform and guide wolf recovery in the state while wolves are considered endangered. The new wolf plan will focus on how the department will conserve and manage wolves in the long term after wolf recovery objectives are achieved.

Why does the department need to develop a new wolf plan now?

Given the current pace of wolf recovery, the post-recovery planning process is being initiated proactively because WDFW anticipates it will likely take two to three years to complete. Ideally, the pace of our planning process would match the pace of Washington wolf recovery.

How will the department develop a wolf post-recovery plan?

The department will propose development of the plan using the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) process. This involves preparing a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will be available for public review. This statement will evaluate actions, alternatives, and impacts related to long-term wolf conservation and management. The first step of the SEPA process involves scoping, which helps us determine proposed actions, alternatives, and impacts to be discussed in the impact statement. Scoping improves decisions and encourages collaboration, cooperation, and early resolution of potential conflicts. It is intended to narrow the impact statement to the relevant issues. Scoping is a public process and we encourage everyone to provide input.

How can I provide my input?

Please submit comments in one of the following ways:

Comments can be submitted online at wdfw.wa.gov/wolves-post-recovery-comments (our preferred method for receiving comments).

Mail a written comment to:

Lisa Wood
SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, WDFW Habitat Program, Protection Division
P.O. Box 43200
Olympia, WA 98504

We are unable to accept or record verbal comments. The deadline for submitting comments is **Nov. 15, 2019 at 5:00 pm**.

What is the time frame for this effort?

Right now, we're in the scoping phase for this project. We plan to review comments, write a draft environmental impact statement, and hold more public open houses once the draft environmental impact statement is released. The final plan is expected to be completed in 2021.

For further information, please contact:

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